

a plurality of central data storage means maintained at a plurality of regional processing centers, each central data storage means includes means for storing transaction data folders which contain bit mapped images, ASCII information about the bit mapped images, messages and completed inquiries;

a plurality of customer service units that are remote from each of the plurality of regional processing centers, each customer service unit having local data storage means of at least 500 megabytes of memory, maintained at the customer service units, the local data storage means includes means for storing transaction data folders which contain bit mapped images and messages and completed inquiries;

means for transmitting said bit mapped images to said customer service units after determining that said bit mapped images are not electronically stored at said customer service units;

a wide area network connecting each regional processing center with at least one customer service unit in a set associated with each of the plurality of regional processing units and connecting the plurality of regional processing centers together;

means for inputting data into each of the plurality of central data storage means from a plurality of sources, said means including means for creating and inputting bit mapped images of hard copy documents;

means for indexing input data in the central data storage means and creating said transaction data folder related to a particular transaction, each transaction data folder containing a

unique identifier and at least one bit mapped image file of at least one hard copy document wherein bit mapped image files of hard copy documents related to the particular transaction are stored in said transaction data folder;

wherein the plurality of customer service units are divided into a plurality of the sets, each set containing at least one customer service unit, where each set of customer service units is associated with one of the plurality of regional processing centers.

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14. A process of trade records information management system for storing, searching, and retrieving data pertaining to financial transactions comprising the steps of:

preprocessing inbound paper-based documents including scanning the inbound paper-based documents;

indexing the inbound paper-based documents;

storing bit mapped images;

storing ASCII information about the bit mapped images;

storing messages and completed inquiries;

inputting data into a central data storage means from a plurality of sources with at least 500 megabytes of local memory;

indexing input data in the central data storage means and creating a transaction data folder, each transaction data folder containing a unique identifier and a bit mapped image file

containing the image of at least one hard copy document, ASCII information about the at least one hard copy document, messages and completed inquiries.

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23. (Amended) A method of managing documents and messages associated with a financial transaction in a system comprising:

- scanning at least one paper document associated with said financial transaction to generate at least one bit mapped image of said at least one paper document at a first site;
- transmitting said at least one bit mapped image to a first regional processing center after determining that said at least one bit mapped image is not electronically stored at the first regional processing center;
- retrieving said at least one bit mapped image at a local trade records information management system from said regional processing center;
- indexing said at least one bit mapped image at said local trade records information management system;
- creating a first transaction folder image at said local trade records information management system wherein said first transaction folder contains information related to said financial transaction including said at least one bit mapped image and said messages;
- storing said first transaction folder at both said local trade records information management system and said first regional processing center; [and]

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retrieving information within said first transaction folder from either said first regional processing center or said local trade records information management system; and

wherein a user may access the first transaction folder at the local trade management information system when the regional processing center is off-line, regardless of the size of the first transaction folder.